

DECLARATION

I, SHINICHI USUI, a Japanese Patent Attorney registered No. 9694, of Okabe International Patent Office at No. 602, Fuji Bldg., 2-3, Marunouchi 3-chome, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan, hereby declare that I have a thorough knowledge of Japanese and English languages, and that the attached pages contain a correct translation into English of the priority document of Japanese Patent Application No. 2000-363685 filed on November 29, 2000 in the name of CANON KABUSHIKI KAISHA.

I further declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made, are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

Signed this 15th day of April, 2004


SHINICHI USUI



PATENT OFFICE
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This is to certify that the annexed is a true copy of the following application as filed with this Office.

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[Title of the Invention] INK, INK TANK, INK-JET CARTRIDGE, AND INK
SUPPLY DEVICE

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[Inventor]

[Domicile or Residence] c/o Canon Kabushiki Kaisha
30-2, 3-chome, Shimomaruko, Ohta-ku, Tokyo

[Name] SHINICHI SATO

[Inventor]

[Domicile or Residence] c/o Canon Kabushiki Kaisha
30-2, 3-chome, Shimomaruko, Ohta-ku, Tokyo

[Name] TETSUJI KURATA

[Applicant]

[Identification No.] 000001007

[Name] CANON KABUSHIKI KAISHA

[Attorney]

[Identification No.] 100077481

[Patent Attorney]

[Name] YOSHIKAZU TANI

[Elected Attorney]

[Identification No.] 100088915

[Patent Attorney]

[Name] KAZUO ABE

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[List of Filed Materials]

[Material]	Specification	1
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[Material]	Drawings	1
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[Title of the Invention]

INK, INK TANK, INK-JET CARTRIDGE, AND INK SUPPLY DEVICE

[Claims]

1. An ink tank that can take in an ink from an ink
5 inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port;
wherein the ink tank is provided with gas-liquid separation
means which does not pass liquid but passes gas, and wherein
the ink has surface tension of 28 mN/m or higher but not
higher than 50 mN/m.
10
2. The ink tank according to claim 1, wherein the
gas-liquid separation means is a gas permeating membrane
comprising a porous resin material being a
tetrafluoroethylene resin or the like.
15
3. The ink tank according to claim 1, wherein the
gas-liquid separation means is a gas permeating membrane
comprising a porous material selected from the group
consisting of unglazed porcelain, earthenware and ceramics.
20
4. The ink tank according to any one of claims 1-3,
wherein the ink tank contains an ink absorbing member capable
of absorbing and holding the ink in the ink container.
- 25 5. The ink tank according to claim 4, wherein the
ink tank has a space between the gas-liquid separation means
and the ink absorbing member.

6. The ink tank according to claim 5, wherein the gas-liquid separation means is provided on an inner surface forming the space.

5

7. The ink tank according to claim 5 or 6, wherein an inner surface forming the space has been subjected to a surface processing.

10 8. The ink tank according to claim 7, where the surface processing is a water-repellent processing.

9. The ink tank according to any one of claims 1-8, wherein the ink tank further comprises an ink outlet for
15 discharging the ink in the tank outside.

10. The ink tank according to claim 9, wherein an ink-jet recording head capable of ejecting the ink is connectable to the ink outlet.

20

11. The ink tank according to any one of claims 1-10, wherein the ink has surface tension of 35 mN/m or higher and not higher than 50 mN/m.

25 12. An ink cartridge comprising an ink tank of claim 1 and an ink-jet recording head for introducing and ejecting an ink in the ink tank

13. An ink supply device for providing an ink to an ink tank of any one of claims 1-11 or an ink tank of an ink cartridge of claim 12, the device comprising:

- 5 means for introducing an ink contained in a main ink tank into the above ink tank through the ink inlet; and
 means for applying negative pressure to the ink tank, the negative pressure being generated by a suction pump.

10 14. An ink tank that can take in an ink from an ink inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port; wherein the ink tank is provided with gas-liquid separation means which does not pass liquid but gas, and wherein the ink contains a surfactant at a content of 1% or less by weight.

15 15. An ink to be contained in an ink tank that can take in an ink from an ink inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port and is provided with gas-liquid separation means which does not pass liquid but passes gas,
20 wherein the ink contains a surfactant at a content of 1% or less by weight.

 16. The ink according to claim 15, wherein the content of the surfactant is not higher than 0.5 wt %.

25 17. The ink according to claim 16, wherein the content of the surfactant is not higher than 0.2 wt %.

18. The ink tank according to any one of claims 15-17,
wherein the tank containing the above-mentioned ink.

[DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION]**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****Field of the Invention**

5 **[0001]**

[Technical field of the invention]

 The present invention relates to an ink, an ink-jet ink, an ink tank and an ink supply device.

[0002]

10 **[Related Background Art]**

 The serial scan system has been used for an ink jet recording device, which comprises a carriage that moves in a primary scanning direction, a recording head as a recording means and a changeable ink tank as an ink container both mounted on the carriage. With this recording system, an image is recorded on a recording medium by repeating scanning of the carriage in the first scanning direction and the movement of the recording medium in a second scanning direction.

20 **[0003]**

 When a subminiature printer suitable for a PDA, a camera, etc. is realized by using such a serial scanning recording system, the size of the carriage must be small, so that the capacity of the ink tank to be mounted on the carriage must be extremely small.

[0004]

 Thus, when the capacity of the ink tank on the carriage

is very small, frequent exchange of the ink tank will be necessary, or it may happen even a case where the ink tank must be changed in the middle of the recording operation.
[0005]

5 Thus, to solve the above problem, an ink supply system called a pit-in ink supply method has been proposed. According to this method, ink is supplied from the separate main tank to the sub tank on the carriage with a proper timing whenever the carriage comes to a predetermined waiting position.

10 [0006]

More specifically, whenever one sheet of the recording medium is printed, for instance, the carriage is positioned at a predetermined position and the main and the sub tank on the carriage are connected with a proper timing, and
15 ink is supplied from the main tank to the sub tank. Thus, the problem relating to the ink capacity of the sub tank on the carries is solved.

[0007]

In the above pit-in ink supply method, the sub tank
20 contains an ink-absorbing member such as sponge inside, and ink is introduced into the sub tank from the main ink tank through an ink inlet due to the negative pressure in the sub tank. The negative pressure in the sub tank is achieved by sucking from an air outlet of the sub tank.

25 [0008]

The present applicant has already filed a patent application for an invention concerning the above pit-in

ink supply method, where a film or membrane called a gas-liquid separation film (membrane) that passes gas but not liquid is provided at the air outlet also called an atmosphere communication opening.

5 [0009]

[Problems to be solved by the invention]

The above system provided with a gas-liquid separation membrane can realize a subminiature supply system, and it can also achieve a supply control (control of the pit-in
10 supply amount of the ink and control of negative pressure) in a simple constitution.

[0010]

During further study and experimentation on the above constitution, the inventors of the present invention have
15 found that when the pit-in supply is repeated, ink may not be supplied in a predetermined amount depending on the ink species.

[0011]

The inventors investigated the cause and found that
20 when a gas-liquid separation membrane that passes gas but not liquid) was used repeatedly in a durability test, sometimes ink penetrated into the gas-liquid membrane partly to deteriorate the membrane properties.

[0012]

25 The present invention was made on such a fact, to provide an ink, an ink tank, an ink-jet cartridge, and an ink supply device that can solve such a problem.

[0013]

[Means for solving technical problems]

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided an ink tank that can take in an ink from an ink inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port; wherein the ink tank is provided with gas-liquid separation means which does not pass liquid but gas, and wherein the ink has surface tension of 28 mN/m or higher but not higher than 50 mN/m.

10 [0014]

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an ink-jet cartridge comprising an ink tank of claim 1 and an ink-jet recording head for introducing and ejecting an ink in the ink tank.

15 [0015]

According to still another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an ink supply device 13. for providing an ink to the above ink tank or the ink tank of the above ink cartridge, the device comprising:

20 means for introducing an ink contained in a main ink tank into the above ink tank through the ink inlet; and means for introducing negative pressure into the ink tank, the negative pressure being generated by a suction pump.

25 [0016]

According to still another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an ink tank that can take in

an ink from an ink inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port; wherein the ink tank is provided with gas-liquid separation means which does not pass liquid but gas, and wherein the ink contains a surfactant at a content of 1% or less by weight.

[0017]

According to still another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an ink to be contained in an ink tank that can take in an ink from an ink inlet under negative pressure applied from a suction port and is provided with gas-liquid separation means which does not pass liquid but gas, wherein the ink contains a surfactant at a content of 1% or less by weight.

[0018]

15 DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Hereinafter, the present invention is described with reference to the drawings.

[0019]

In the following description, "printing" or "recording" means formation of any of images, designs and patterns on a print medium, or processing of a print medium, whether the images etc. are meaningful or meaningless, or visual or non-visual to human eyes.

[0020]

25 "Print medium" or "recording medium" means any material capable of receiving ink, including not only paper widely used by general printer devices, but also cloth, plastic

membrane, metal plate, glass, ceramics, wood, leather etc.

Hereinafter, "paper" indicates "print medium".

[0021]

In the description, "camera" means a mechanism or device
5 to take an optical image and convert the optical image into
electrical signals. Hereinafter it is also called an imaging
unit.

[0022]

Also, "ink" or "liquid" is interpreted as wide as
10 the definition of "printing", indicating a liquid which
serves, when applied to a print medium, to form images etc.,
or to process the print medium or to treat the ink, for
example, to solidify or insolubilize the coloring matter
contained in the ink applied onto the print medium.

15 [0023]

[Basic constitution]

First, the basic constitution of a device according
to the present invention will be described referring to
FIGs. 1 to 14. An device of the present invention is an
20 information processing device having an imaging unit or
camera unit which converts the obtained image into electric
signals and an image recording unit (or a printing unit
herein) that records an image according to the electric
signals. In the following description, the information
25 processing device may be called a "printer built-in camera"
or a device body A001.

[0024]

In the device body A001, a printing unit (a recording unit) B100 is assembled integrally to the back of a camera unit A100. The printing unit B100 records an image by using ink and a recording medium provided from the media pack C100. In this constitution, as shown in FIG. 5 where the back casing is removed from the device body A001, a media pack C100 is attached to the right hand side, and a printing unit B100 is attached at the left hand side of the device body A001.

10 [0025]

When printing is carried out by the printing unit B100, the device body A001 should be laid in such a position that a liquid crystal display A105 faces upward and a lens A101 faces downward. In such a printing position, a recording head B120 of the printing unit B100 can eject ink downward. Alternatively, the recording position may be the same as the position to take an image by using the camera unit A100. In view of stable recording operation, it is preferable that the ink is ejected downward.

20 [0026]

Hereinafter, the basic mechanical constitution of the device of the invention is explained dividing it into I: camera unit, II: media pack, and III: printing unit.

[0027]

25 A: Camera unit

Basically, the camera unit A100 corresponding to a general digital camera is combined integrally with a printing

unit B100 to constitute the device body A001 having the appearance as shown in FIG. 3. In FIGs. 1 to 3, A101 denotes a lens, A102 denotes a finder, A102a denotes a finder window, A103 denotes a strobe, A104 denotes a release button, and
5 A105 denotes a liquid crystal display unit (external display unit). The camera unit A100, as described later, processes data picked up using a CCD, stores images to a compact flash memory card (CF card) A107, displays images, and transmits and receives various data between the printing unit B100.

10 A109 denotes a discharge unit for discharging a print medium C104 on which images were recorded. A108 in FIG. 5 denotes a battery as a power source for the camera unit A100 and the printing unit B100.

[0028]

15 B: Media Pack

The media pack C100 is detachable from the device body A001. In this embodiment, C100 is inserted into an insert part A002 (see FIG. 3) of the device body A001 to be mounted to the device body A001 as shown in FIG. 1. When the media
20 pack C100 is not mounted, the insert part A002 is closed as shown in FIG. 3, and it is opened when the media pack C100 is mounted. FIG. 5 shows the device body A001 on which the media pack C100 is mounted and of which casing is removed.

As shown in FIG. 4, the main body C101 of the media pack
25 C100 is provided with a shutter C102 slidable in the direction of arrow D. When the media pack C100 is not mounted on the device body A001, the shutter C102 is in a position shown

with a two-dotted dash line (the position of C102'), and when the media pack C100 is mounted, C102 slides to the position shown with a real line in FIG. 4.

[0029]

5 The body C101 of the media pack C100 contains an ink pack C103 and a print medium C104. In FIG. 4, the ink pack C103 is stored under the print medium C104. In this embodiment, there are three ink packs C103 to contain Y (yellow), M (magenta), and C (cyan) inks respectively, and
10 there are, for example, approximately 20 sheets of print medium C104 in stacks. Those ink packs C103 and print medium C104 are contained in the same media pack C100 in a combination appropriate for desired image recording. Thus, there are a variety of media pack C100, e.g., for ultra high quality
15 printing, normal quality printing, or seal printing, of various combinations of inks and print media, and a media pack C100 is selected and mounted on the device body A001 according to the type of the image to be recorded and the use of the print. Thus, the aimed image can be recorded
20 without fail by using the optimum combination of inks and print medium. Additionally, the media pack C100 is provided with an EEPROM (identification IC) as described later, in which identification data such as the type of inks and print medium contained in the media pack or the residual amounts
25 thereof are stored.

[0030]

When the media pack C100 is mounted on the device body

A001, it is connected to the ink supply system of the device body A001 later described through three joints C105 corresponding to Y, M and C inks respectively. Meanwhile, a sheet of the print medium C104 separated by a separating mechanism (not shown) is supplied in the direction of arrow C by a paper supply roller C110 (see FIG. 9). The driving force of the paper supply roller C110 is supplied via a connection unit C110a from a later described conveyer motor M002 (see FIG. 9) provided in the device body A001.

10 [0031]

In addition, C101, the body of the media pack, is provided with a wiper C106 for wiping the recording head of the later described printing unit and an ink absorber C107 for absorbing waste ink discharged from the printing unit. As described later, the recording head shuttles along the scanning direction of arrow A in the printing unit. When the media pack C100 is dismounted from the device body A001, the shutter C102 slides to a position shown by the two-dotted dash line in FIG. 4 to protect the joint C105, the wiper C106 and the ink absorber C107.

[0032]

C : Printing unit

The printing unit B100 of this embodiment is a serial type using an ink-jet recording head. Here, the printing unit B100 is described in three installments of III-1: Print operation unit, III-2: Print medium drive system, and III-3: Ink supply system.

[0033]

C-1 : Print Operation Unit

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the total printing unit B100 and FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the partly open-up printing unit B100.

[0034]

As shown in FIG. 5, the top portion of the media pack C100 mounted on the device body A001 is disposed at a predetermined position in the printing unit B100. The print medium C104 supplied from the media pack C100 in the direction of arrow C is driven on a platen B103 in a subscanning direction of arrow B, being held between an LE roller B101 and an LF pinch roller B102 in the print medium transport system. The transport system is described later. B104 denotes a carriage shuttling in the scanning direction of arrow A along a guide shaft B105 and a lead screw B106.

[0035]

As shown in FIG. 8, the carriage B104 are provided with a shaft bearing B107 for the guide shaft B105 and a shaft bearing B108 for the lead screw B106. At a home position of the carriage B104, as shown in FIG. 7, a screw pin B109 projecting inside the bearing B108 is mounted by a spring B110. The tip of the screw pin B109 fits into the spiral groove on the lead screw B106, so that the rotation of the lead screw B106 is converted into the reciprocal movement of the carriage B104.

[0035]

The carriage B104 is also provided with an ink-jet recording head B120 capable of discharging Y, M and C inks and with a sub tank (not shown) containing inks to supply them to the recording head B120. The head B120 has a plurality
5 of ink ejection ports B121 (see FIG. 8) arranged in a direction crossing the scanning direction of arrow A (in this example, at right angles). The ink ejection ports B121 constitute nozzles capable of ejecting inks supplied from the sub tank.

The energy generating means for ejecting inks, for example,
10 is an electro-thermal converting element provided at each nozzle. The electro-thermal converting element generates heat to form an air bubble in the ink in the nozzle, and an ink droplet is discharged from the ink ejection port B121 by the energy of bubbling.

15 [0037]

The ink capacity of the sub tank is smaller than that of the ink pack C103 installed in the media pack C100, but is enough to print one sheet of the print medium C104. The sub tank comprises ink containers for yellow, magenta and
20 cyan inks, and each ink container is provided with an ink inlet through which the ink is supplied and an air outlet through which air is sucked to generate negative pressure in the ink container. These ink inlets are respectively connected to three hollow needles B122, and these air outlets
25 are connected to a common air suction port B123. Such a sub tank receives inks from the ink pack C103 in the media pack C100 when the carriage B104 returned to the home position

as shown in FIG. 6. This is described later in detail.

[0038]

In the carriage B104 of FIG. 8, B124 is a needle cover.

When the needle B122 and the joint C105 of the media pack
5 are not connected, the cover B124 comes in a position to
protect the needle B122 by the action of the spring as shown
in FIG. 8. While, when the needle B122 and the joint C105
are connected, the cover B124 is pushed upward against the
force of the spring to release the protection of the needle
10 B122. The moving position of the carriage B104 is detected
by an encoder sensor B131 of the carriage B104 and a linear
scale B132 (see FIG. 6) of the body of the printing unit
B100. The movement of the carriage B104 to the home position
is detected by an HP (home position) plug B133 of the carriage
15 B104 and an HP sensor B134 (see FIG. 7) of the body of the
printing unit B100.

[0039]

In FIG. 7, at both ends of the guide shaft B105, a
support shaft (not shown) decentered from the central axis
20 of B105 is provided. The support shaft controls the rotation
of the guide shaft B105, which controls the position of
the carriage B104 so as to control the distance between
the recording head B120 and the print medium C104 on the
platen B103. The lead screw B106 is rotated by a carriage
25 motor M001 via a screw gear B141, an idler gear B142 and
a motor gear B143. B150 denotes a flexible cable
electrically connecting the recording head B120 and a control

system described later.

[0040]

Moving in the main scan direction with the carriage B104, the head B120 records one line image on the print medium C104 on the platen B103 by ejecting ink from the ink ejection port B121 according to image signals. By repeating one-line recording operation by the head B120 and carriage of the print medium in the subscanning direction of arrow B for a certain distance by the following print medium carriage system by turns, an image is recorded on the print medium in order.

[0041]

C-2 : Print medium carriage system

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the constitution of the print medium carriage system in the printing unit B100.

In FIG. 9, B201 denotes a pair of paper discharge rollers.

In FIG. 9, the upper roller B201 is driven by the carriage motor M002 via a paper discharge roller gear B202 and a relay gear B203. In the same manner, the roller B101 is driven by the motor M002 via a LF roller gear B204 and the relay gear B203. The paper discharge roller B201 and the LF roller B101 carry the print medium C104 in the direction of arrow B by the driving force of the carriage motor M002 in normal rotation.

[0042]

On the other hand, when the carriage motor M002 is reversely rotated, a press plate head B213 and a lock mechanism

(not shown) are driven through a switching slider B211 and a switching cam B212, and the driving force is transmitted to the paper supply roller C110 in the media pack C100. That is, the plate head B213 presses the print medium C104
5 piled in the media pack C100 downwardly in FIG. 4 through a window C102A (see FIG. 4) of the shutter C102 by the driving force of the carriage motor M002 in reverse rotation. Accordingly, the lowermost sheet of the print medium C104 in FIG. 4 is pressed to the paper supply roller C110 in
10 the media pack C100. While, the lock mechanism (not shown) prevents release of the media pack C100 locking the media pack C100 to the device body A001 by the driving force of the carriage motor M002 in reverse rotation. Then the paper supply roller C100 of the media pack 100 conveys the sheet
15 C104 at the lowest position of FIG. 4 in the direction of arrow C by the driving force transmitted from the carriage motor M002 at its reverse rotation.

[0043]

In this way, by the reverse rotation of the motor M002,
20 only one sheet of the print medium C104 is taken out from the media pack C100 in the direction of arrow C, and then, by the normal rotation of the carriage motor M002, the sheet is conveyed in the arrow direction.

[0044]

25 C-3 : Ink supply system

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the constitution of an ink supply system in the printing unit B100, and FIG.

11 is a plane view when the media pack C100 is mounted in the constitution of the ink supply system.

[0045]

The joint C105 of the media pack C100 mounted to the printing unit B100 comes under the needle B122 (see FIG. 8) of the carriage B104 when the carriage B104 comes to the home position. Under the joint C105, a joint fork B301 (see FIG. 10) provided to the body of the printing unit B100 comes. The joint fork B301 moves the joint C105 upwardly so that the joint C105 is connected to the needle B122.

Accordingly, an ink supply path is formed between the ink pack C103 of the media pack C100 and the ink inlet of the sub tank B400 of the carriage B104.

[0046]

The body of the printing unit B100 is provided with a feed joint B302 which comes under the air suction port B123 (see FIG. 8) of the carriage B104 at the home position.

This feed joint B302 is connected to a pump cylinder B304 of a pump as a negative pressure generation source via a feed tube B303. The joint B302 is moved upwardly by a joint lifter B305 to be connected to the air suction port B123 of the carriage B104. The joint lifter B305 moves the joint fork B301 and the joint B302 up and down by the driving force of the joint motor M003.

[0047]

The air outlet of the sub tank B400 is provided with a gas-liquid separation member (not shown) for permitting

the passage of air and inhibiting the passage of ink. The gas-liquid separation member permits suction and passage of air in the sub tank through the suction path, and accordingly ink is supplied from the media pack C100 to the sub tank. Then, when the ink is sufficiently supplied to the sub tank and reaches to the gas-liquid separation member, the gas-liquid separation unit inhibits passage of the ink and supply of the ink is automatically stopped. Since the gas-liquid separation member is provided to the air outlet of each ink container of the sub tank, supply of respective inks is automatically controlled.

[0048]

The body of the printing unit B100 is also provided with a suction cap B310 which caps the recording head 120 (see FIG. 8) moved to the home position. The suction cap B310 can suck and remove the ink in the ink ejection port B121 of the recording head B120 (suction recovery process) through the negative pressure inside introduced by the pump cylinder B304 via the suction tube 311. If necessary, the recording head B120 can eject ink not participating in image recording into the suction cap B310 (preliminary ejection process). The ink in the suction cap B310 is drained to the ink absorption body C107 in the media pack C100 via the pump cylinder B304, a waste tube B312 and a waste liquid joint B313.

[0049]

The pump cylinder B304 constitutes a pump unit B315

with a pump motor M004 which drives the pump cylinder B304 reciprocally. The pump motor M004 also functions as a driving force of the up and down motion of a wiper lifter B316 (see FIG. 10). The wiper lifter B316 drives a wiper C106 of the media pack C100 mounted on the printing unit B100 up and down, so that the wiper C106 is moved to the position where the wiper can wipe the recording head B120.

5 [0050]

In FIGs. 10 and 11, B321 denotes a pump HP sensor that detects whether the operating position of the pump cylinder B304 is at the home position or not. B322 denotes a joint HP sensor for detecting the formation of the above-described ink supply path and suction path. B323 denotes a chassis constituting the body of the printing unit B100.

10 [0051]

In this embodiment, the camera unit A100 and the printing unit B100 are integrated into a printer built-in camera. However, it is possible to realize the same function by separating the camera unit A100 and the printing unit B100 into individual units connected by an interface.

15 [0052]

An embodiment of the ink supply system in the present invention is now described.

[0053]

25 <Ink supply recovery system>

FIG. 12 shows a constitution concept of an ink supply recovery system.

[0057]

In FIG. 12, the media pack C100 contains three ink packs (also referred to as main tanks) C103 filled with three color inks of Y (yellow), M (magenta) and C (cyan).

5 The three ink packs C103 are connected to three joints (ink joints) C105 via three ink supply paths C200.

[0055]

The media pack C100 has a waste introduction opening C120 (see FIG. 4) into which a waste joint B313 (see FIG. 10) installed at the tip of the waste tube B312 of the printing unit B100 is inlet. The media pack C100 is provided with a waste ink absorber C107 for containing waste ink introduced via the opening 120 from the pump cylinder B304.

[0056]

15 The carriage B104 is provided with sub tanks (carriage tanks) B400 for storing Y, M and C inks respectively and a recording head B120 having a plurality of ink ejection ports (nozzles) B121 divided into three groups (Y, M and C) for ejecting each ink supplied from corresponding carriage
20 tank B400.

[0057]

Each ink-container (ink supply unit) of the sub tank B400 is nearly filled with an ink absorber B401, a sponge made of polypropylene fiber etc., to absorb and hold ink.
25 As shown in FIG. 8, each ink container of the sub tank B400 is provided with a needle (an ink inlet) B122 having a through hole and projecting downward. These three needles B122 can

be connected to three rubber joints C105 of the media pack C100 when the carriage B104 is moved to the home position.

As a result, a main tank C103 is connected to the ink container B416 of the sub tank B400 via an ink supply path C200

5 communicated to the main tank C103, an ink joint C105 provided at the end of the ink supply path and the needle B122 of the sub ink tank B400, so that the ink contained in the main tank C103 is supplied to the ink container B416 of the sub ink tank B400.

10 [0058]

At the upper part of each ink container of the sub tank B400, an air outlet B410 is formed. At the air outlet B410, as described above, a gas-liquid separation member, a porous membrane (ink filling up valve) B402 is provided.

15 The porous membrane has been treated to be water-repellent and oil-repellent to pass gas but not ink. Since the porous membrane B402 inhibits passage of the ink, so that the supply of ink is automatically stopped when the liquid level of the ink in the sub tank B400 reached to the porous membrane
20 B402.

[0059]

Each air outlet B410 of the sub tank B400 is in communication with a common air suction port B123 (see FIG. 8) formed at the downward face of the carriage B104, as
25 described above. This air suction port B123 can be connected to a supply joint B302 installed at the body of the printing unit B100 when the carriage B104 moves to the home position,

thereby connected to one of the cylinder chambers of the pump cylinder B304 via the supply joint B302 and a supply tube B303.

[0060]

5 The printing unit B100 is provided with a suction cap B310 for capping the facing surface (on which an ink ejection port is formed) of the recording head B120 on which a plurality of ink ejection ports (nozzles) B121 for three groups of Y, M and C when the carriage B104 is moved to the home position.

10 The suction cap B310 is provided with an air communication port B404. This air communication port B404 can be opened and closed by an air communication valve (not shown). Here, the ink ejection port B121 becomes an ink supply port for supplying the ink contained in the ink containing unit of
15 the sub ink tank to the outside. In addition, within the limits of the present invention, the recording head B120 can be formed as a separate member from the sub ink tank B400 and the recording head can be connected to the ink supply port provided at the sub ink tank B400.

20 [0061]

 The suction cap B310 is connected to another cylinder chamber of the pump cylinder B304 through a suction tube B311.

[0062]

25 The pump cylinder B304 has three ports being connected to the supply tube B303, suction tube B311 and waste tube B312.

[0063]

Meanwhile, it is preferable that there is a space B412 between a gas permeable member B402 and the ink absorber B401 provided inside the sub tank B400 as shown in FIG.

5 12, not to contact with each other. When the gas permeable member B402 is in contact with the ink for a long period, the gas-liquid separation function may be deteriorated.

In this embodiment, however, there is a space between the gas permeable member B402 and the ink absorber B401 so as
10 to prevent direct contact between them, thereby the member B402 and the ink would not contact except for the period of ink supply. Therefore, the degradation of the function of the gas permeable member B402 can be prevented. It is also preferable that the inner surface (e.g., the surface
15 denoted by B414) surrounding the space B412 is constituted in such a manner that adhesion of the ink is suppressed as much as possible by the surface treatment, for example, by giving water-repellency.

[0064]

20 (Compatibility between gas-liquid separation membrane and ink)

Hereinafter, the compatibility between a gas liquid separation membrane B402 and ink used for the above-described supply system will be described, which is the feature of
25 the present invention.

[0065]

The present inventors have examined the gas-liquid

separation function using various inks in the above supply system to find that with certain inks the gas permeable function is not maintained to the predetermined number of times of ink replenishment.

5 [0066]

FIGs. 13(a)-(d) are schematic enlargements of the vicinity of the gas-liquid separation membrane B402. FIG. 13(a) shows the normal state of the gas-liquid separation membrane B402. The gas-liquid separation membrane B402
10 itself has a plurality of micropores "e" as shown in FIG. 13(a), and usually the inside of the container is communicated to the outside thereof.

[0067]

FIG. 13(b) shows the state where ink is supplied into
15 the sub tank B400 by the above described supplement operation.

As shown in the drawing, when the ink supplied into the sub tank B400 reaches the gas-liquid separation membrane B402, the supply of ink is stopped by the above-described function that passes gas but not liquid.

20 [0068]

As shown in FIG. 13(c), however, ink of certain types penetrates into the micropores e of the membrane B402 to form meniscus when the ink supply operation is repeated many times, inhibiting gas communication after that.

25 [0069]

Furthermore, as shown in FIG. 13(d), there is a case where the micropores e are clogged at the interface between

ink and the membrane B402. Although the cause has not been clarified in detail, the inventors think that such a failure occurs due to the interaction (reaction) between a detergent in the ink and the membrane B402.

5 [0070]

Anyway, properties of the gas-liquid separation membrane B402 may be deteriorated according to the types of the ink.

[0071]

10 Usually, ink contains a coloring material such as a pigment or dye, an aqueous medium to maintain the coloring material in a dissolved or dispersed state or both, various aqueous solvents to prevent solidification of the ink, an aqueous solvent or surfactant to control physical properties
15 of the ink or penetration properties into a recording medium, and salts to control electric properties or pH of the ink and so on.

[0072]

Investigating the deterioration of the membrane, the
20 inventors have found that among the various ink components the amount of the surfactant is closely related to the performance of the membrane in gas-liquid separation.

[0073]

Surfactants reduce surface tension or improve
25 wettability of a liquid, and they tend to gather at the interface when the ink contacts the gas-liquid exchange portion.

[0074]

The reason why the amount of the surfactant and the performance of the membrane B402 are co-related is presumed as follows on the basis of the above surfactant properties.

5 [0075]

1. Addition of a surfactant lowers the surface tension of the ink, so that the ink tends to penetrate into the gas-liquid separating member to form meniscus therein, which deteriorates air-permeability.

10 [0076]

2. Addition of a surfactant to ink changes wettability of the ink to the surface of the gas-liquid separation member so that the ink tends to penetrate into the member to form meniscus therein, which deteriorates air-permeability.

15 [0077]

3. Addition of a surfactant to ink causes aggregation of the surfactant molecules at the interface of the gas-liquid separation member to change the contact angle of the ink to the gas-liquid separation member so that the ink tends to penetrate into the member to form meniscus therein, which deteriorates air-permeability.

[0078]

4. Addition of a surfactant to ink causes aggregation of the surfactant molecules at the interface of the gas-liquid separation member and interact with the surface material of the gas-liquid separation member to change the water repellent and oil repellent properties of the surface

25

material, which deteriorates the function of the gas-liquid separation member.

[0079]

In this regard, although the allowed amount of such
5 a surfactant in the ink varies according to the species,
it is preferable the amount of the surfactant is as small
as possible. For example, a surfactant may be added in an
amount preferably 1% by weight or less, more preferably
0.5% by weight or less. Further, a good result can be obtained
10 regardless of the surfactant species when the amount is
0.2% or less.

[0080]

When the surfactant is added within such a range as
described above, it can prevent the ink from flowing into
15 micropores of the gas-liquid separation membrane B402.

[0081]

Further, the inventors have found that to maintain
the original performance of the gas-liquid separation member,
the surface tension of the ink is preferably not less than
20 28 mN/m and not higher than 50 mN/m, and when the surface
tension is 35 mN/m or above, good results can be obtained
regardless of the species of the surfactant.

[0082]

In this case, also, performance deterioration of the
25 gas-liquid separation was observed occasionally when the
surface tension was 27 mN/m or less.

[0083]

Conventionally known surfactants can be used in the present invention; for instance, anionic surfactants such as fatty acid salts, higher alcoholic ester salts, alkylbenzene sulfonates and/or phosphoric ester salts of higher alcohols; cationic surfactants such as aliphatic amine salts and quaternary ammonium salts; nonionic surfactants such as higher alcohol ethylene oxide additives, alkylphenolethylene oxide adducts, aliphatic ethylene oxide adducts, polyalcohol aliphatic ester ethylene oxide adducts, aliphatic amidethylene oxide adducts, higher alkylaminethylene oxide adducts, polypropylene glycolethylene oxide adducts, fatty acid ester of polyalcohols and/or fatty acid amide of alkanolamine; and amphoteric surfactants such as amine acids and betaine.

[0084]

Such surfactants are not particularly limited, however, may be properly nonionic surfactants such as ethylene oxide adducts of higher alcohols, ethylene oxide adducts of alkylphenol, ethylene oxide-propylene oxide copolymer, ethylene oxide adducts of acetylene glycol. In addition, ethylene oxide adducts having 4-20 addition molar numbers are more preferably employed.

[0085]

Specifically, preferably used are nonionic surfactants including ethylene oxide adducts.

[0086]

(Amount of surfactant when an ink absorption material B401

is present inside)

As described above, the lesser the amount of the surfactant is added, the more preferable it is in view of the gas-liquid separation member B402 and the ink. However,
5 if the sub ink tank B400 contains the absorption material B401 in it to hold the ink, the ink must be absorbed by the B401.

[0087]

Accordingly, the ink preferably contains a surfactant
10 not less than 0.05% by weight, more preferably 0.1% by weight or above.

[0088]

Other Embodiments

The gas-liquid separation member B402 may be properly
15 selected from the materials having gas-liquid separating function. According to the ink species and use conditions, various materials can be used. For instance, in addition to the gas-permeable membrane made of porous resin materials such as tetrafluoroethylene resin etc., other porous
20 materials such as unglazed porcelain, earthenware and ceramics are properly applicable to produce the gas-liquid separation member B402 according to the present invention.

[0089]

Additionally, the ink tank of the present invention
25 is not limited to such an ink tank that moves with the recording head in a serial scan type recording apparatus, including an ink tank provided at a predetermined position.

[0090]

Moreover, the ink-jet cartridge of the present invention may have a constitution in which the ink tank and the recording head are connected either integrally or detachably.

[0091]

As described above, according to the present invention, a proper ink is used directing an attention to the amount of the detergent in the ink and the surface tension of the ink, so that deterioration of gas-passing function of the gas-liquid separation member is prevented, which enables constantly stable ink supply and maintenance of stable negative pressure characteristics.

[0092]

Furthermore, according to the present invention, the ink supply by suction is automatically stopped utilizing the function of the gas-liquid separation member. Accordingly, the ink is supplied to the ink tank without fail using a simple constitution, which serves to realize a smaller and lighter recording apparatus and enhance reliability.

{BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a front view of a camera with a built-in printer to which the present invention is applicable;

FIG. 2 is an oblique front view of the camera of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an oblique rear view of the camera of FIG.

1;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of a media pack mountable to the camera of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view illustrating an inside
5 arrangement of the main constitution parts of the camera of FIG. 1;

FIG. 6 is a perspective view illustrating a printing unit of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is an open-up view of the printing unit of FIG.
10 6;

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of the carriage of the printer portion of FIG. 6;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view illustrating a constitution parts of a print medium transfer system in the printing
15 unit of FIG. 6;

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of constitution part of an ink supply system in the printing unit of FIG. 6;

FIG. 11 is a plan view of a media pack mounted to the constitution part of the ink supply system of FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 illustrates a constitution outline of an ink
20 supply recovery system; and

FIG. 13 illustrates action of a gas-liquid separation membrane.

[Annotation of Symbols]

25 A001: Body of the device

A002: Insert part

A100: Camera

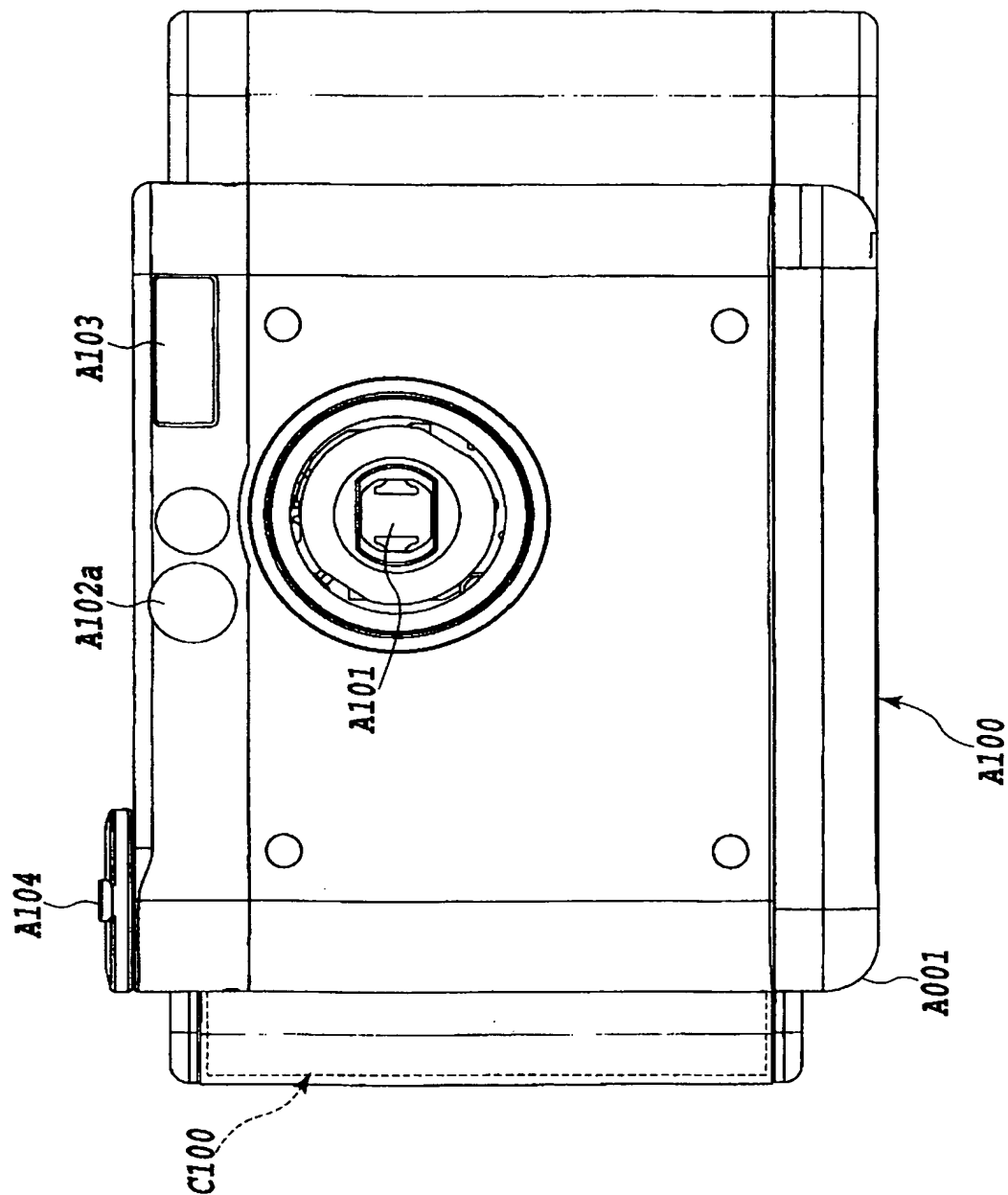
A101: Lenz
A105: Liquid crystal display
B100: Printer unit
B101: Roller
5 B102: Pinch roller
B103: Platen
B104: Carriage
B105: Guide shaft
B106: Lead screw
10 B109: Screw pin
B120: Ink jet recording head
B121: Ink ejection orifice
B122: Needle
B123: Air suction port
15 B131: Encoder sensor
B132: Linear scale
B133: Plug
B134: Sensor
B141: Screw gear
20 B142: Idler gear
B143: Motor gear
B201: Paper discharge roller
B202: Paper discharge roller gear
B203: Relay gear
25 B204: LF roller gear
B211: Slider
B212: Cum

- B213: Press plate head
- B301: Joint fork
- B302: Feed joint
- B303: Feed (supply) tube
- 5 B304: Pump cylinder
- B305: Joint lifter
- B310: Suction cap
- B311: Suction tube
- B312: Waste tube
- 10 B313: Waste liquid joint
- B315: Pump unit
- B316: Wiper lifter
- B400: Sub tank (ink tank, carriage tank)
- B401: Ink absorber
- 15 B402: Gas-liquid permeating member (gas-liquid separation
membrane, gas-permeating member, porous membrane)
- B404: Air communication port
- B410: Air outlet (for achieving negative pressure)
- B412: Space
- 20 C100: Media pack
- C101: Main body of the pack
- C102: Shutter
- C102A: Window
- C103: Ink pack
- 25 C104: Print medium
- C105: Rubber joints
- C106: Wiper

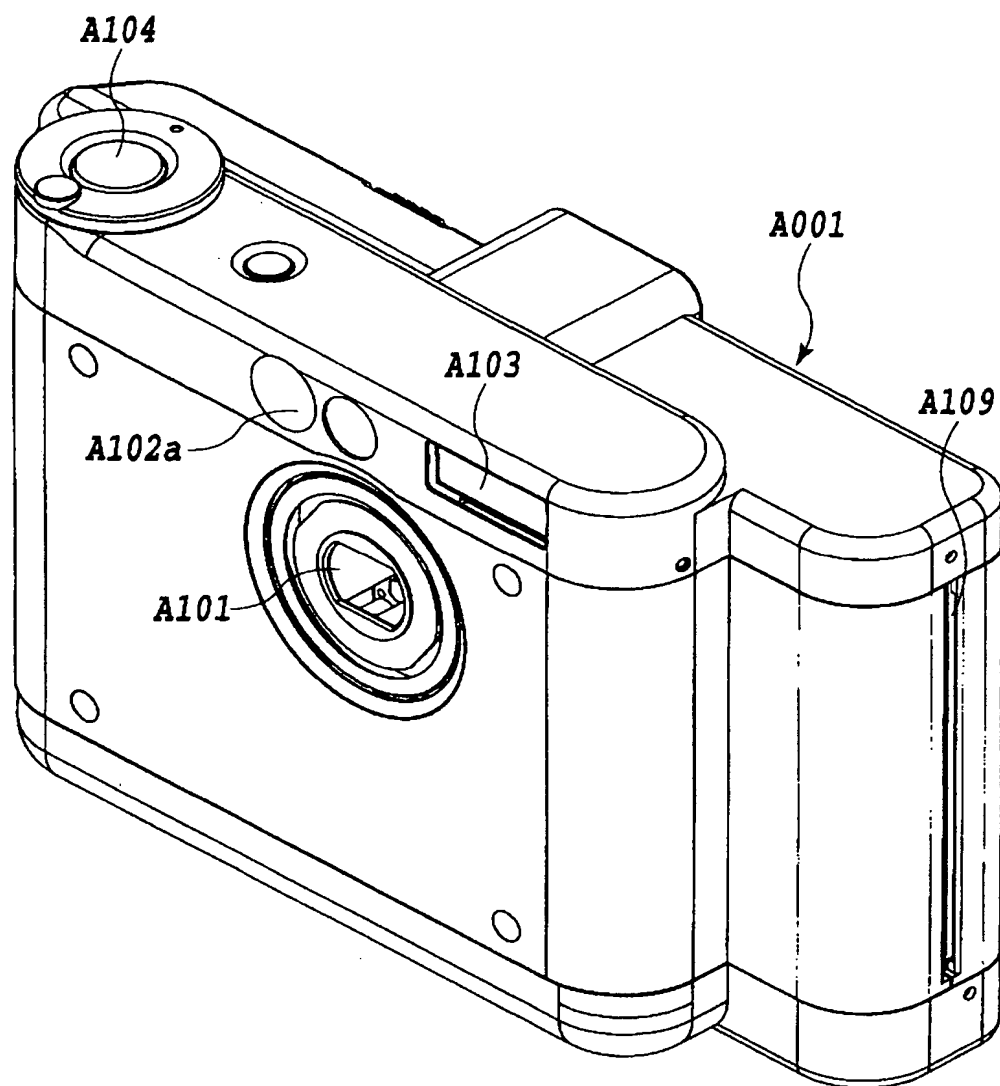
- C107: Waste ink absorber
- C110: Paper supply roller
- C110a: Connection unit
- C120: Waste introduction opening
- 5 C200: Ink supply path
 - M001: Carriage motor
 - M002: Conveyer motor
 - M003: Joint motor
 - M004: Pump motor
- 10 e: micropore

【書類名】 図面

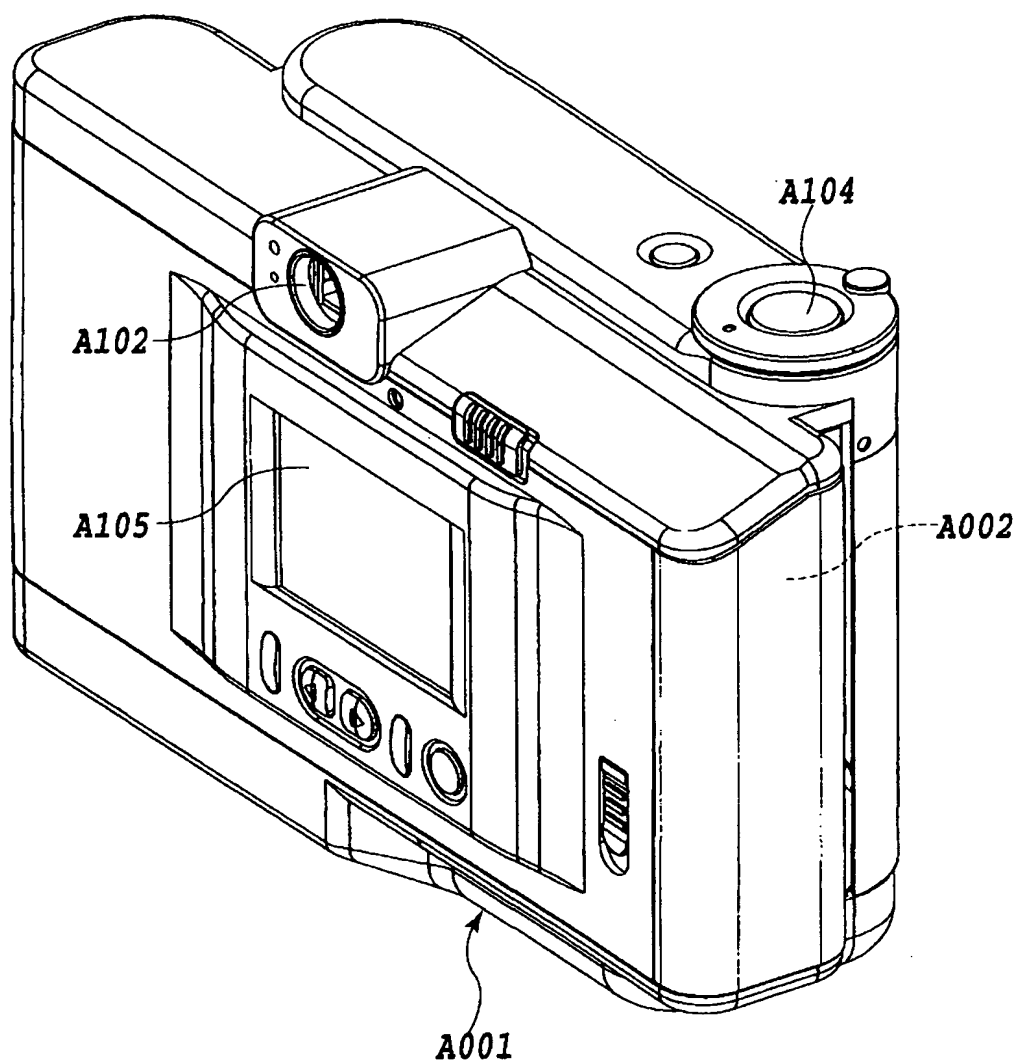
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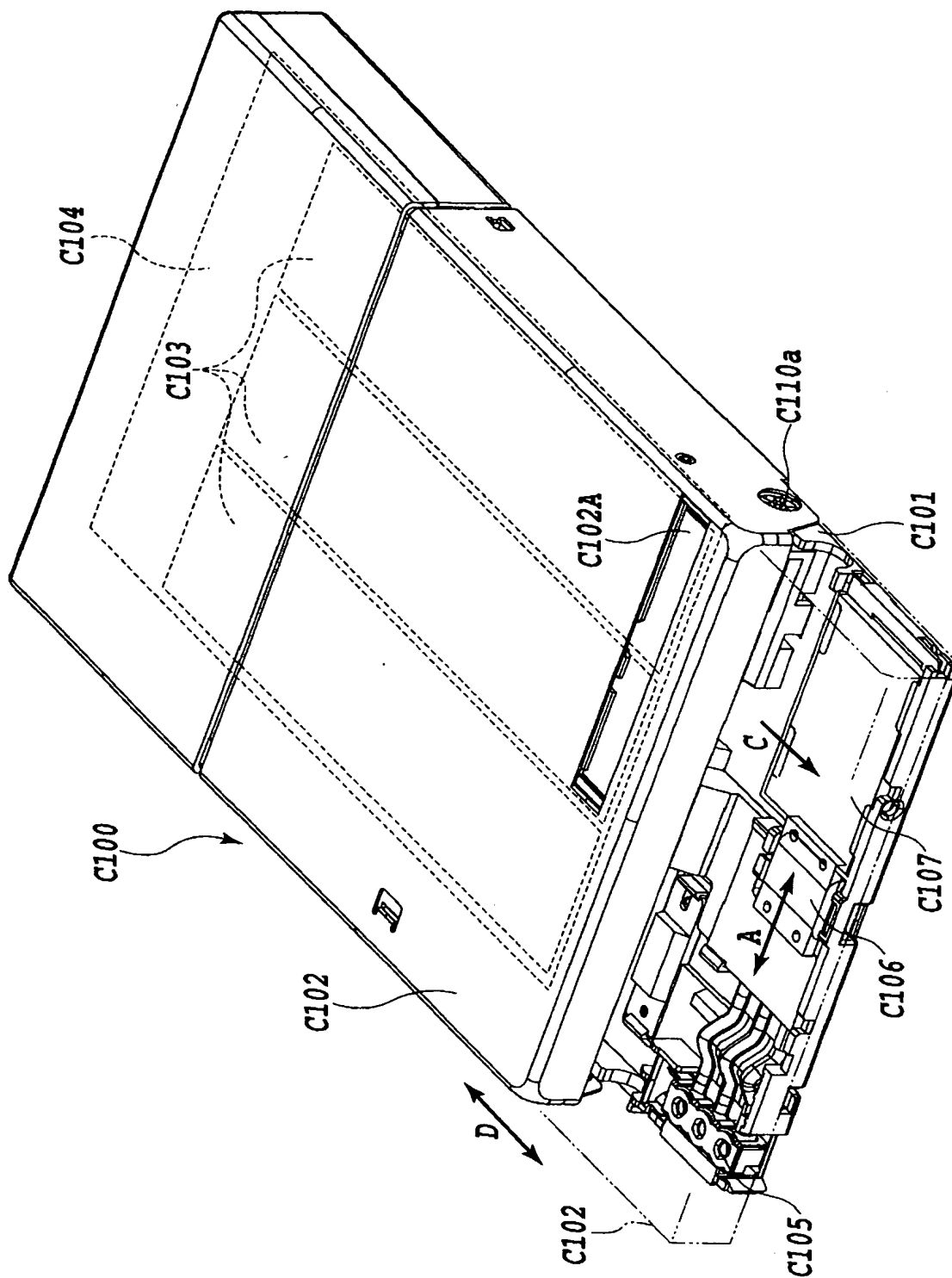
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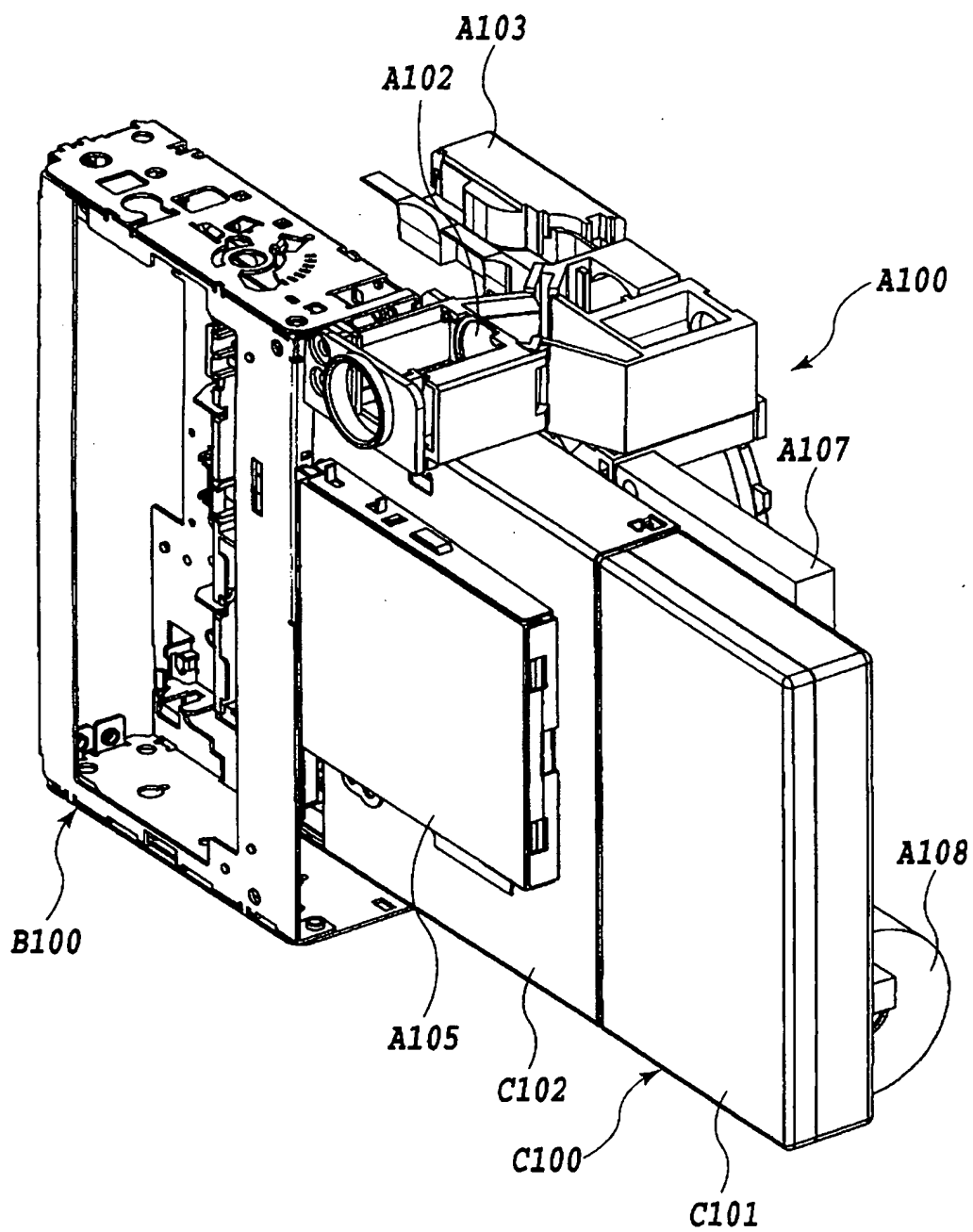
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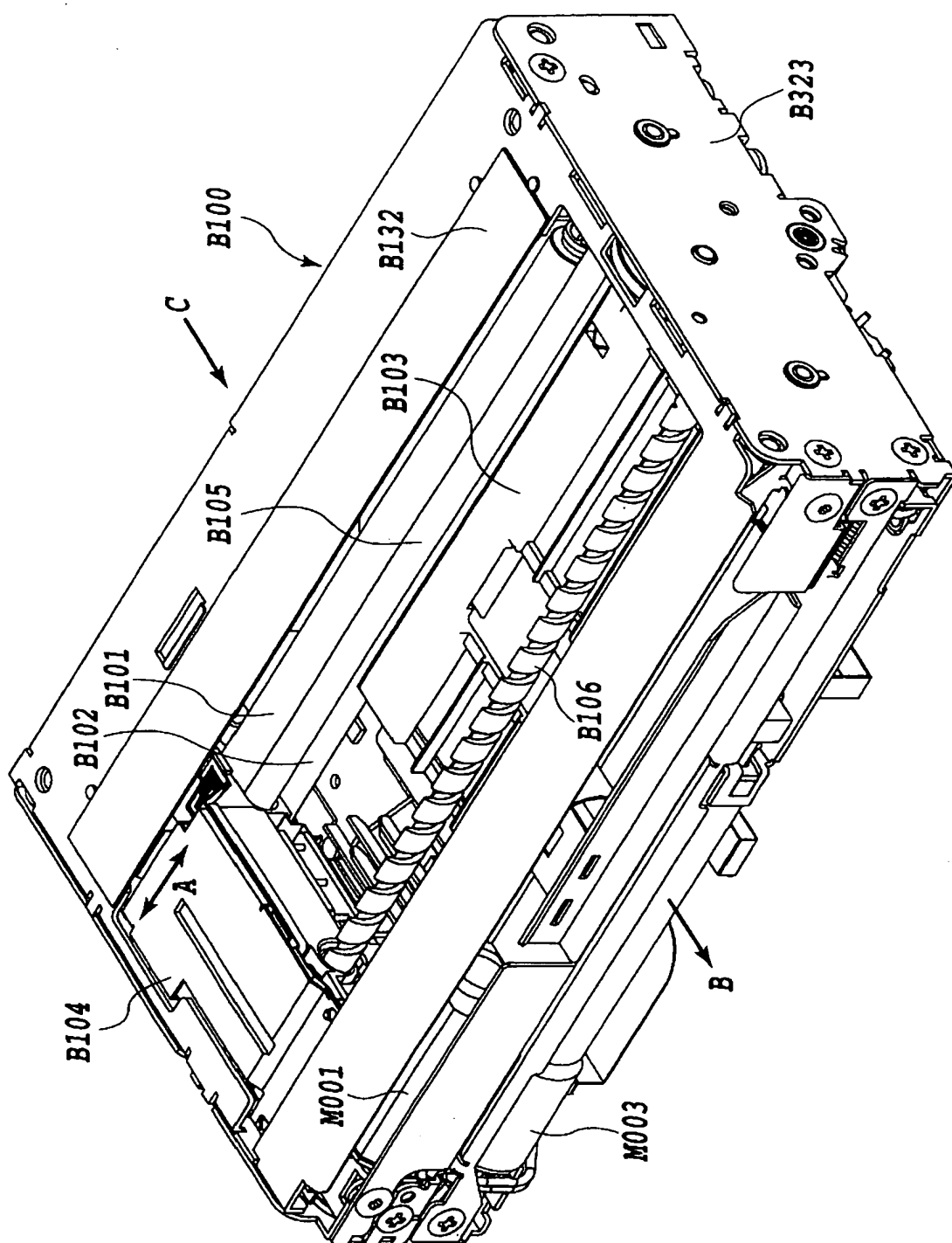
【図 4】



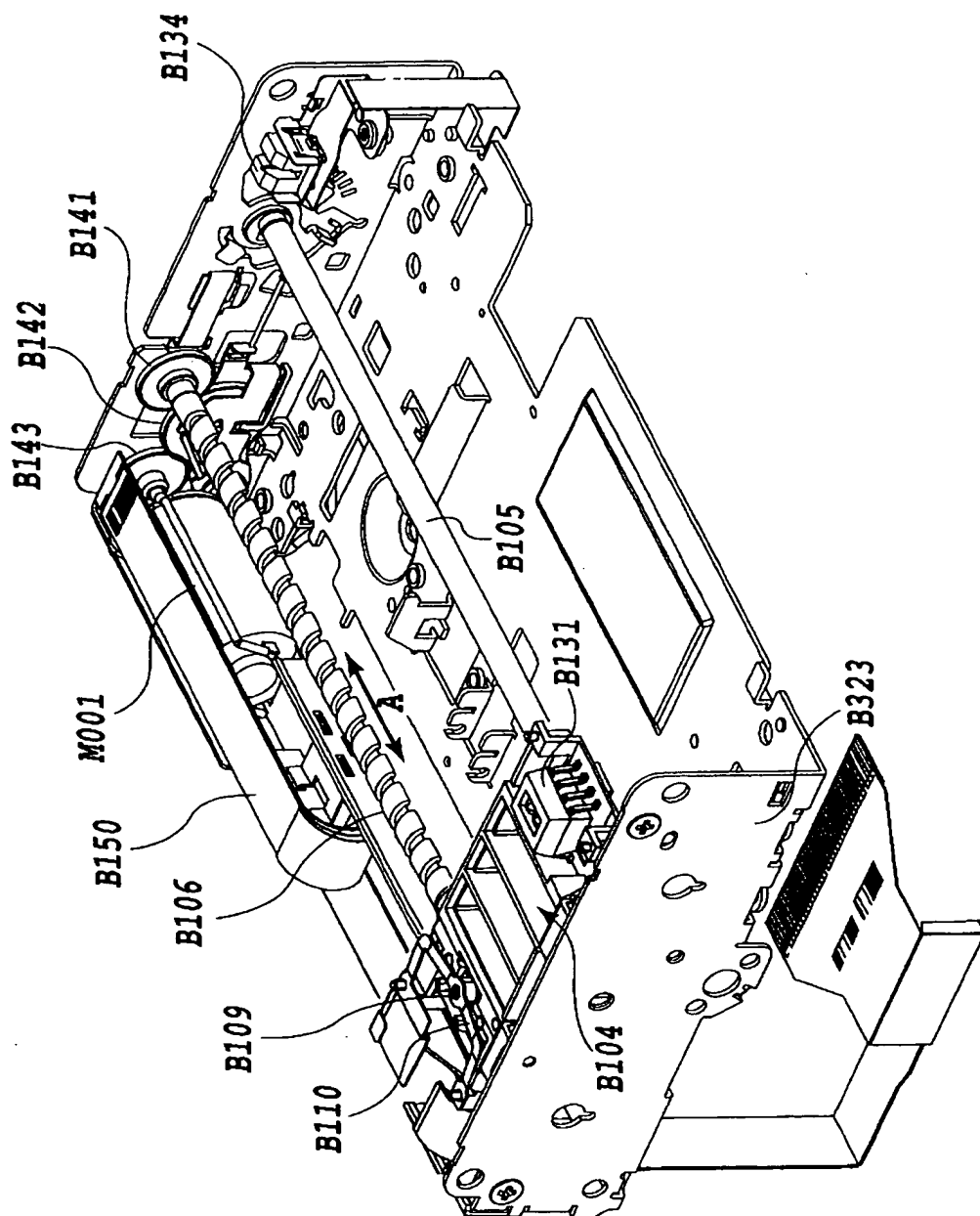
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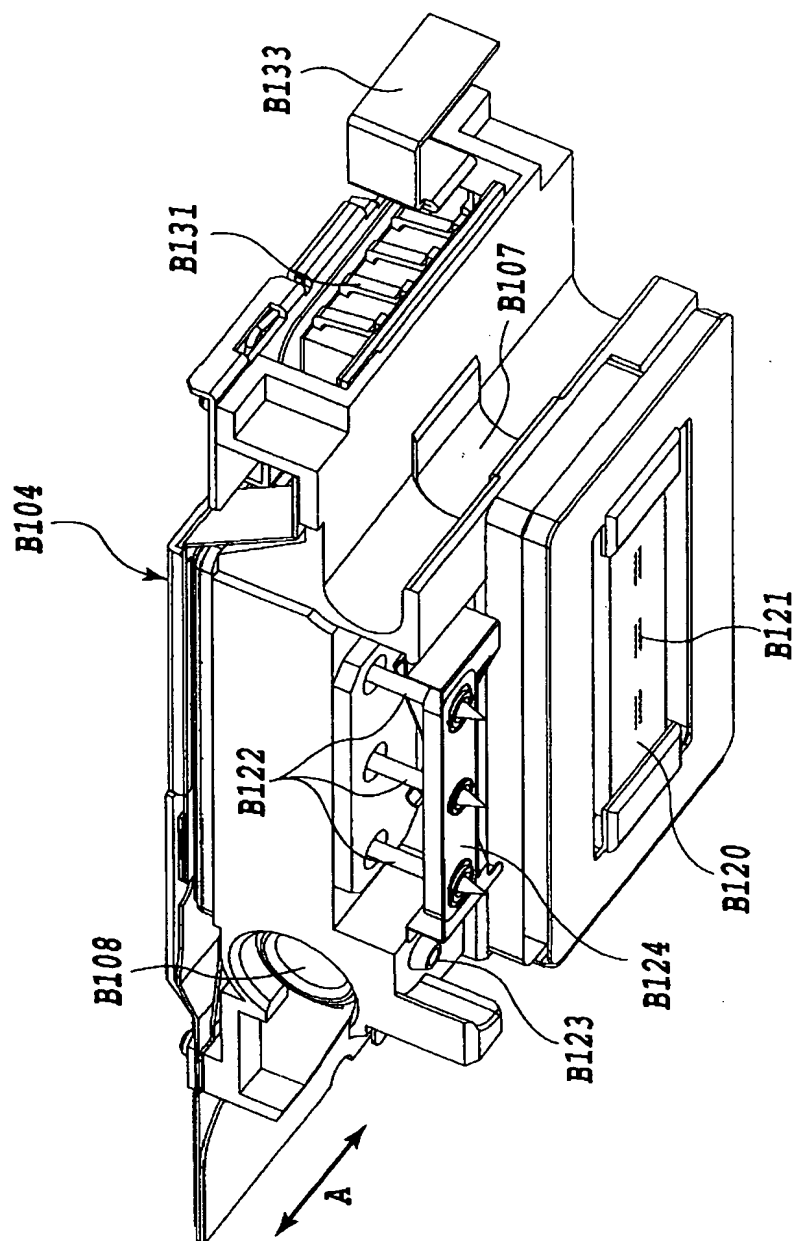
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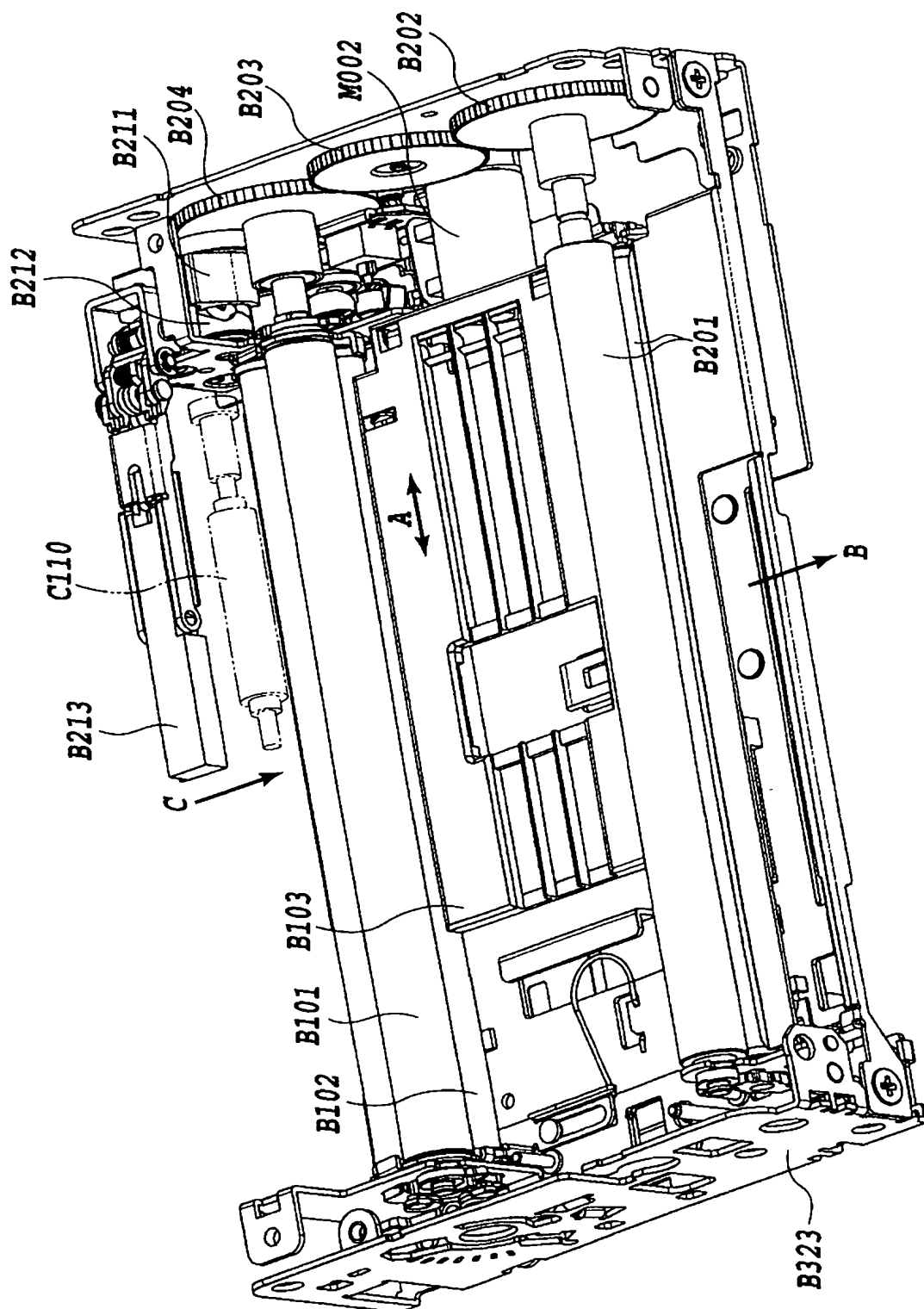
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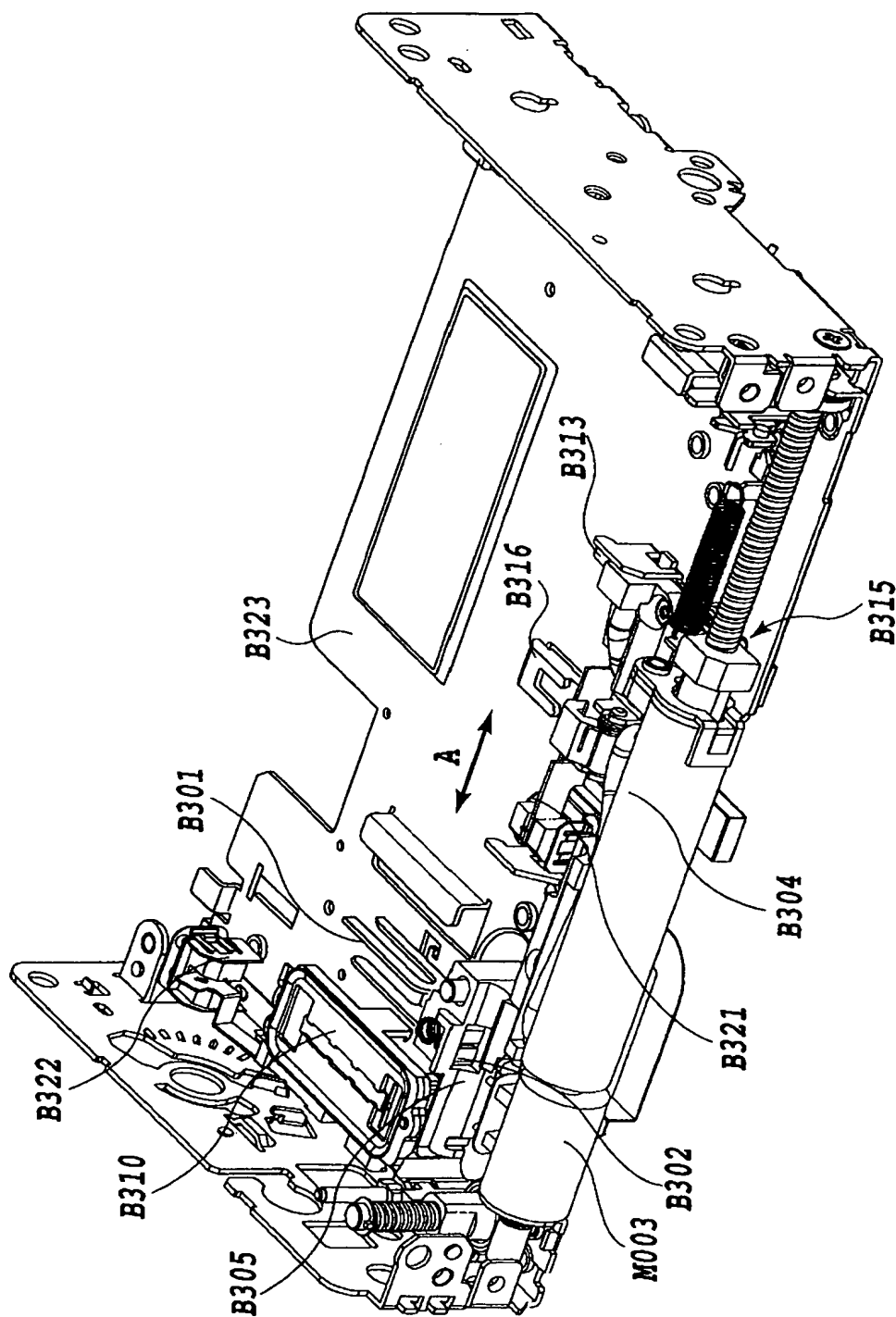
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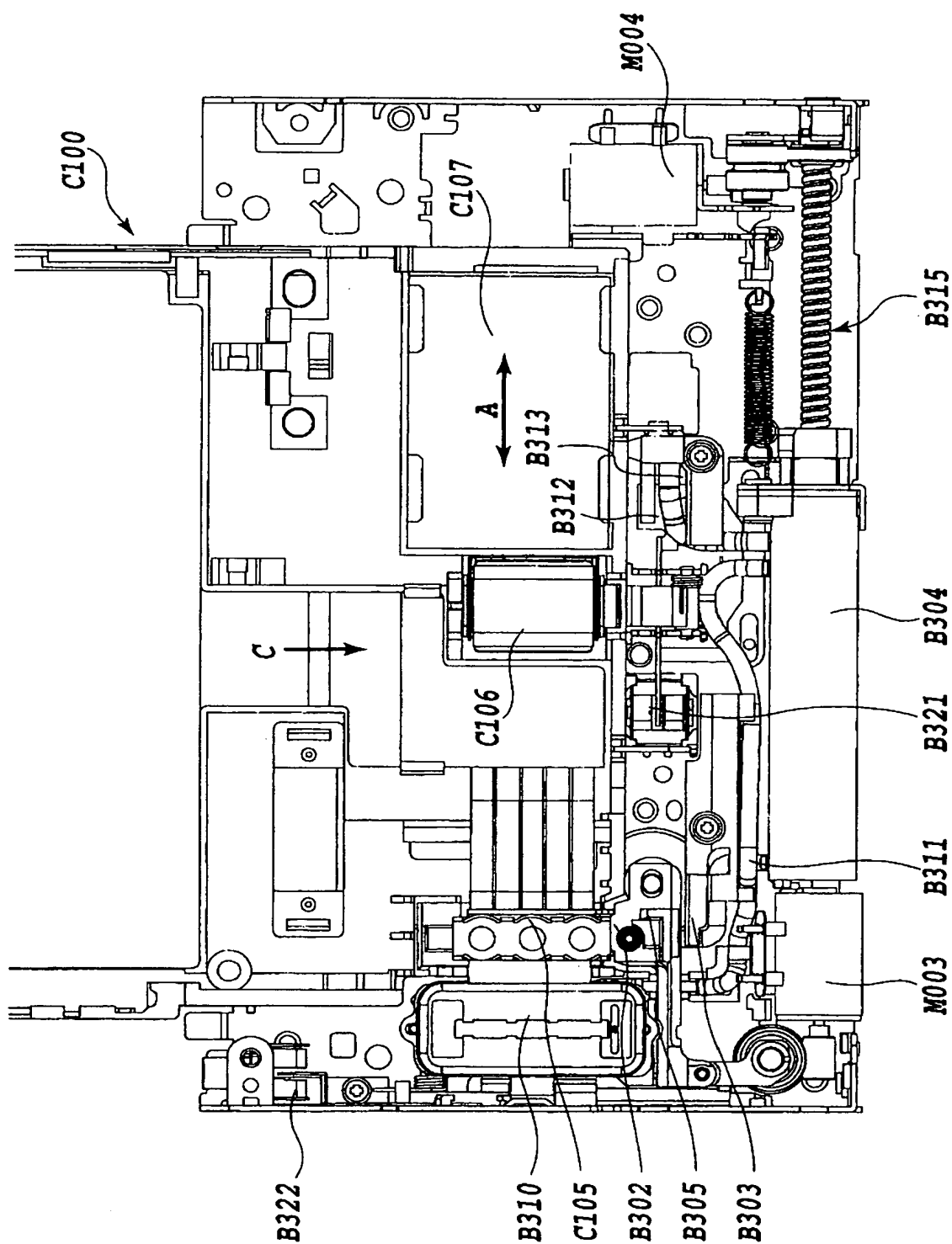
【図9】



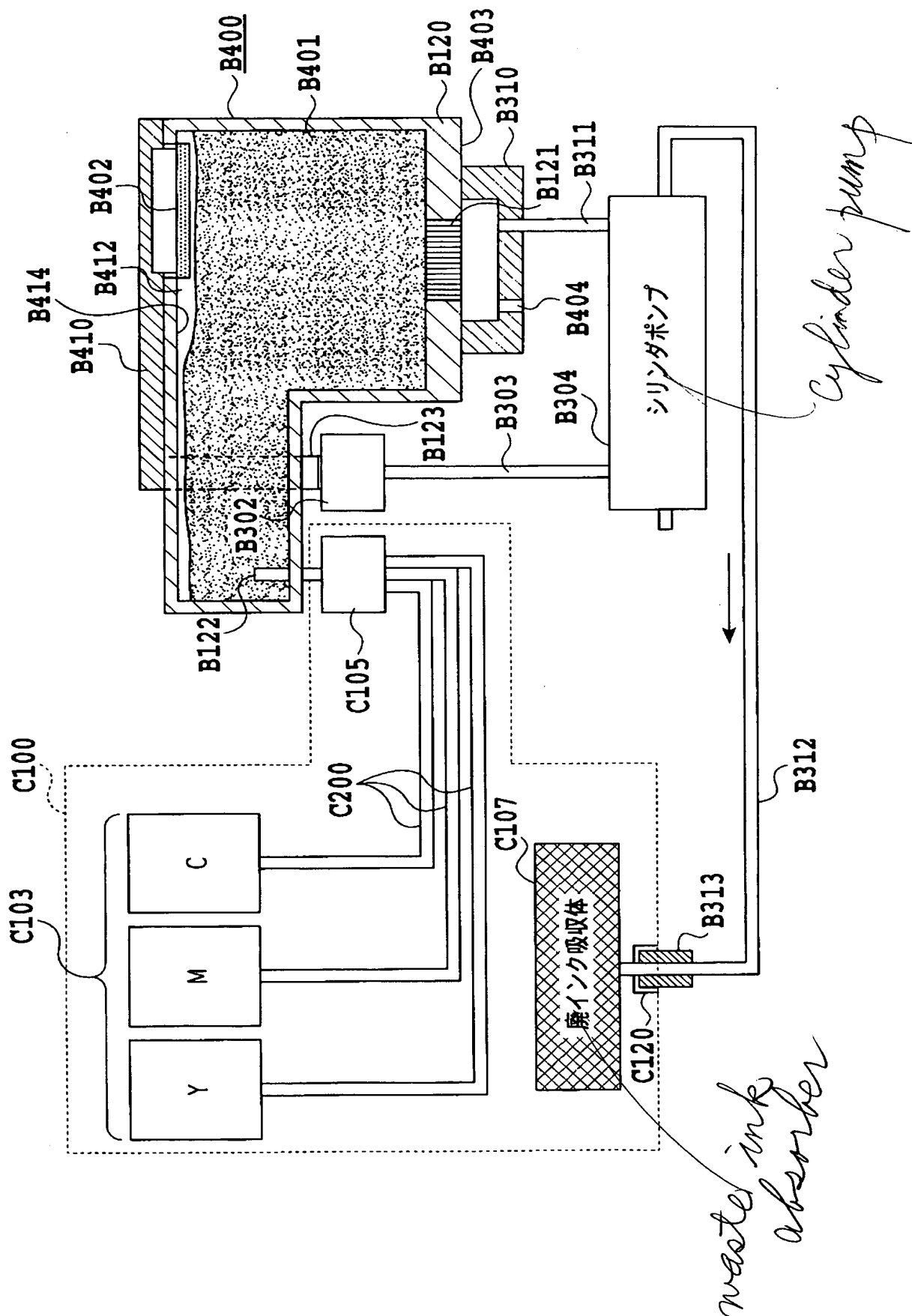
【図10】



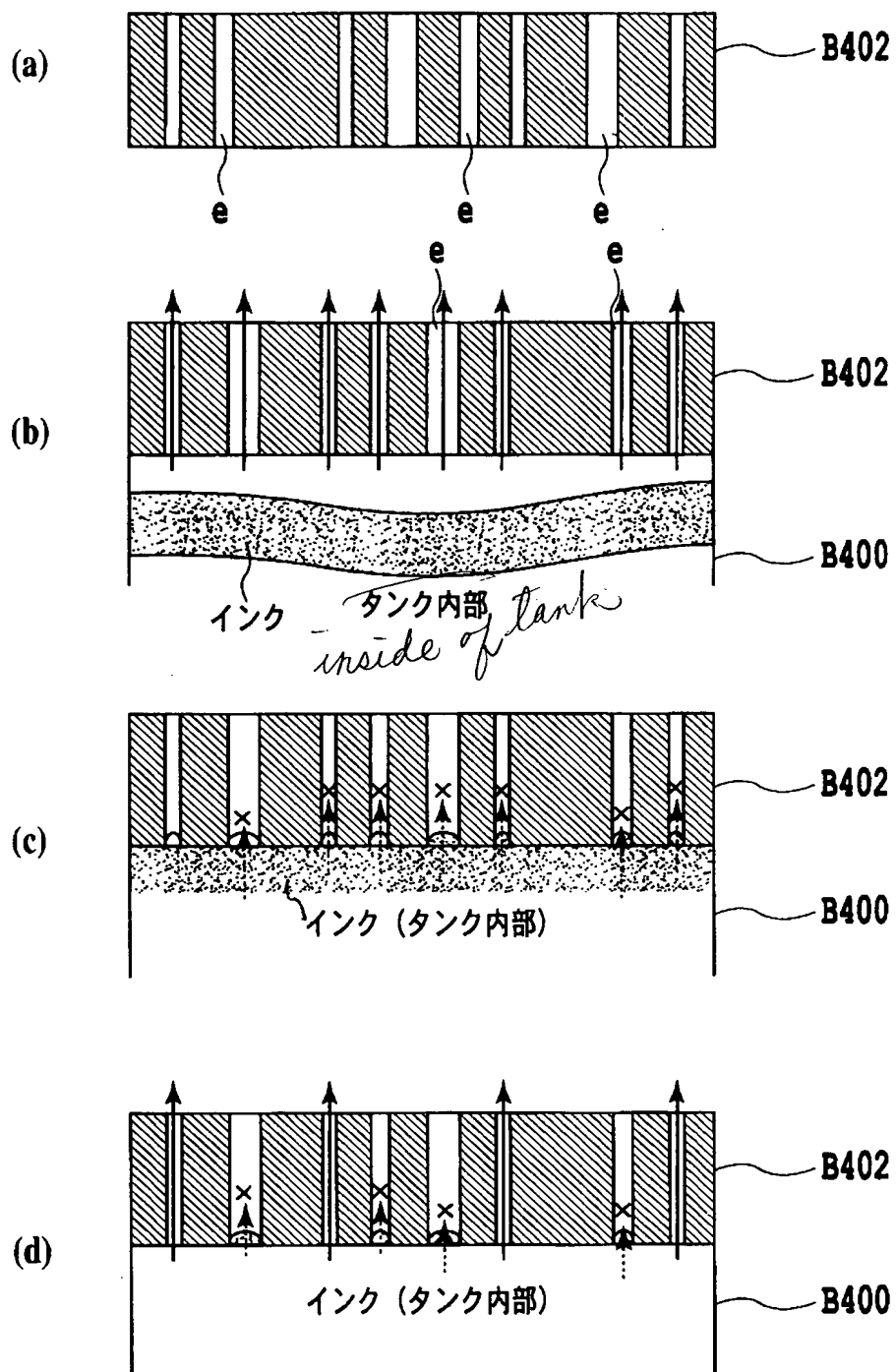
【図11】



【図12】



【図13】



[Document Name] ABSTRACT

[Abstract]

[Problem to be solved] Prevention of deterioration of gas-liquid separation member in gas-permeability

[Means for solving problem]

An ink tank that can take in an ink through an ink inlet B122 under negative pressure achieved through air suction port B123 and B410, wherein a gas-liquid separation means is provided at the air suction port to pass gas but not liquid, and the ink has surface tension of 28 mN/m or higher but not higher than 50 mN/m.

[Elected Figure] FIG. 12

2000-363685

Applicant's Information

Identification No. [000001007]

1.	Date of Change	August 30, 1990
	[Reason for Change]	New Registration
	Address	30-2, 3-chome, Shimomaruko, Ohta-ku, Tokyo
	Name	CANON KABUSHIKI KAISHA

2001-3110584